

# Republic of the Marshall Islands

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Jackeo A. Relang, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United Nations to the Fourth Committee of the 51st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on Item 82: Effects of Atomic Radiation**

**October 16, 1996**

*As Written*

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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time my delegation is taking the floor during the current session, I would like to offer you our congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of this Committee and to assure you of our support and cooperation. My delegation is confident that your diplomatic skills and profound understanding of the issues before us will greatly facilitate our work in this Committee. Our congratulations are also extended to the other members of the Bureau on their well-deserved election.

Mr. Chairman,

The Marshall Islands was the site of more than sixty six nuclear weapon tests conducted by the Administering Authority during the period of the United Nations Trusteeship of the Pacific Islands. The total yield of those weapons was equivalent to more than seven thousand bombs the size of that which destroyed Hiroshima.

Many years subsequent to the nuclear weapons tests, the Marshall Islands became a Member State of the United Nations in September of 1991. It was then that we began to reveal our deep concerns regarding the effects of atomic radiation. Since then, the World have been hearing us speak about human suffering in the visual context of Marshallese children being born who could only be described as "monster babies"(faceless with jellyfish like bodies, severe deformation with one eye, two heads, one leg, etc). We reported that Marshallese women suffered silently with irreparable damages wreaked upon their reproductive health, with cancerous lumps in their bodies and of their suffering through surgeries to have their thyroid glands removed. Men were suffering from the same medical illnesses, but this was compounded by their sense of helplessness in not being able to protect their families from this invisible killer. We have repeatedly voiced our experiences with leukemia and other radiogenic diseases, which have been killing our children. Our limited scientific knowledge on the effects of radiation was further influenced by misleading information. However, it was evident that the impact of radiation effects on our environment, including contamination of the soil, edible plant and animal life, was far greater than we thought, in that several areas of our atolls were kept entirely off limits until today. The World has been informed of displaced populations in the Marshall Islands, yet the displaced continue to lead a nomadic way of life.

Mr. Chairman,

Fifty years have passed since the first nuclear tests, and we are still addressing our concerns on the effects of atomic radiation. Testing of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands is a matter of more than simply historical interest. There is a direct and relevant indication that the effects are long lasting and they continue to be experienced by persons living today, and in our view will continue to do so in generations to come. Ignoring our concerns can be a weapon, but in our view there is a moral obligation and responsibility to peoples who have silently and painfully suffered the effects of atomic radiation.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation welcomes the Reports of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and we are encouraged by the work undertaken thus far. However, we regret to note that it has been a prolonged process. Furthermore, in the view of my delegation, the reports have not been informative enough, as well as immensely remote from addressing the concerns raised by my Government on this item. We wish to acknowledge that similar work has been undertaken by other agencies. But an action oriented way forward has eluded us until now. We have failed to show any resolution toward assisting the victims of radiation illnesses, and international cooperation is not a complete success.

Mr. Chairman,

The Marshall Islands Minister of Foreign Affairs has noted my Government's gratefulness to President Clinton and his Administration for their transparent policy of disclosure of previously classified information. We wish to reiterate our appeal that such cooperation continues to improve and that the process of disclosure is accelerated that my Government may fully comprehend the implications to our planning for the health and well-being of our citizens and our environment.

Mr. Chairman,

We should recall the advisory opinion tendered by the International Court of Justice on the legality of threat or use of nuclear weapons, which recognized that all members of the international community have an obligation, to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion, negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

Mr. Chairman,

It is in light of our suffering experience from long-term effects of atomic radiation we acted promptly in the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We wish to see the early implementation of the Treaty, and we congratulate Fiji for their early ratification last week.

Mr. Chairman,

Again this year we renew our appeal to all Governments and International Organizations which have expertise in this field, to consider giving appropriate assistance as may be requested for remedial purposes in these affected areas in respect to cleanup and disposal of radioactive contaminants.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, my delegation would again urge the Special Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation to reassess the usefulness of its Report in light of a review of its mandate. We have questions that should be answered, so do Japan and others. The Committee should not just be a discussion hall with no concrete results. In this regard it is incumbent on me to inform this Committee that my delegation intends to bring certain amendments to the resolution which has been tabled by Germany on behalf of a number of delegations under this agenda item (A/C.4/51/L.3). We would have preferred to have had an opportunity to discuss this matter with the co-sponsors before the resolution was put forward, but we hope that our amendments will be given serious consideration. The amendments were transmitted to Germany yesterday, and we look forward to a constructive discussion with them.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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